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Security Council

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Report of the Security Council mission on the Kosovo issue

I. Terms of reference of the mission

1. On the basis of a proposal by the Russian Federation, the Security Council decided to undertake a mission on the Kosovo issue, as conveyed to the Secretary-General by the President of the Security Council in his letter of 19 April 2007 (S/2007/220). On 24 April, the Security Council received a comprehensive briefing on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno. The mission took place from 25 to 28 April. The mission had the terms of reference set out below.

2. The year 2007 emerges as a significant year for Kosovo. In the light of the recent submission of the United Nations Special Envoy's set of proposals to the Security Council, the Council has decided to give its members the opportunity to inform themselves on the situation on the ground, by sending a Security Council mission to Belgrade and Kosovo, from 25 to 28 April 2007. The mission will also visit Brussels and Vienna. A balanced programme and comprehensive schedule of meetings will provide the Security Council members with a first-hand understanding of progress made since the Security Council approved resolution 1244 (1999). It will allow the Security Council to have an informed understanding of the political, social and economic situation in Kosovo. Earlier Council missions took place in April 2000, June 2001 and December 2002.

3. The mission had the following objectives:

(a) To obtain first-hand information on progress made in Kosovo since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), including on the implementation of the agreed standards;

(b) To receive information directly from the leadership of Serbia and the Provisional Institutions for Self-Government of Kosovo and from representatives of Kosovo's ethnic minorities communities on the current political, social and economic situation in Kosovo, as well as on the regional situation;

(c) To receive information directly from representatives of the international community, in Brussels and on the ground, on the current political, social and economic situation in Kosovo, as well as on the regional situation.

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II. Composition of the mission

4. The mission was composed of the following members:

Ambassador Johan C. Verbeke, Head of Mission (Belgium)
Minister Counsellor Li Junhua (China)
Ambassador Basile Ikouebe (Congo)
Ambassador Jean-Marc de la Sablière (France)
Ambassador Leslie K. Christian (Ghana)
Ambassador Hasan Kleib (Indonesia)
Ambassador Marcello Spatafora (Italy)
Ambassador Ricardo Alberto Arias (Panama)
Minister Luis Enrique Chávez (Peru)
Minister Mutlaq M. Al-Qahtani (Qatar)
Ambassador Vitaly Churkin (Russian Federation)
Ambassador Peter Burian (Slovakia)
Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo (South Africa)
Ambassador Karen Pierce (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad (United States of America)

III. Activities of the mission and summary of meetings

Brussels

5. Before visiting the region, the mission visited Brussels on 25 April, where it had discussions with the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); the Special Envoy of the European Union for Kosovo, Stefan Lehne; and the European Enlargement Commissioner, Ollè Rehn.

6. The Secretary-General of NATO described the security situation in Kosovo as calm but tense. The political process in recent months had raised expectations in Kosovo. He cautioned that as long as Kosovo's status remained undefined, and its economic development inhibited, the situation in both Kosovo and the region remained at risk. Parties might wish to establish faits accomplis on the ground. He stated that the maturity of Kosovo's political leaders had grown significantly. The Secretary-General assured the mission that the Kosovo Force (KFOR) was ready to swiftly and effectively respond to security challenges and stressed that violence would not be tolerated.

7. The Secretary-General supported the Kosovo settlement proposal and recommendation on Kosovo's future status prepared by the Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari. NATO was preparing to lead the international military presence in Kosovo as envisaged in the settlement proposal. Under the proposal, NATO would maintain responsibility for ensuring a safe and secure environment, it would supervise and train the envisaged Kosovo Security Force, and would manage the dissolution of the Kosovo Protection Corps. The protection of identified Serb patrimonial and religious sites in Kosovo, which he expected would be required for the foreseeable future, was a long-term priority and NATO was prepared to carry out this task as long as necessary. The Secretary-General emphasized that NATO would need a Security Council resolution under Chapter VII in order to accomplish these tasks.

8. Mr. Lehne believed that maintaining the status quo in Kosovo was not possible and that further delay in the process was in nobody's interest. He emphasized the responsibility of the European Union for Kosovo and the Union's special interest in maintaining a stable and secure region. The European Union had five objectives regarding the Kosovo issue, namely (a) a commitment to building a multi-ethnic Kosovo; (b) creating functional institutions based on local ownership and accountability; (c) a clear intention not to establish an international protectorate; (d) full engagement with Serbia; and (e) continued engagement with Kosovo's regional neighbours. In order to pursue these objectives, the European Union was carrying out forward planning for its future role in Kosovo, without prejudging the outcome of the future status. Mr. Lehne recalled that the European Union had indicated its full support for the Special Envoy's settlement proposal.

9. Commissioner Rehn stressed that the European Union had a special stake in the successful outcome of the Kosovo future status process. The approach adopted by the Special Envoy offered the necessary solutions. Mr. Rehn underlined the need for a Security Council resolution that would provide legal and political clarity. In emphasizing the commitment of the European Union to providing Kosovo with a European perspective, he noted that only sovereign States could enter into contractual relations with the European Union, a necessary step in the accession process. Mr. Rehn believed that the incentive and prospect of the eventual integration of Kosovo into European institutions would provide a strong catalyst for Kosovo's leaders to pursue the implementation of standards and build a multi-ethnic, functional Kosovo. He also addressed the issue of whether Kosovo would set a precedent for other "frozen conflicts", and noted that it would be up to the Security Council to decide whether this would be the case. He believed that the Kosovo issue was sui generis, the result of a unique set of circumstances.

Belgrade

10. On 26 April the mission had meetings in Belgrade with the Prime Minister of Serbia, Vojislav Kostunica, and members of the Negotiating Team. The mission also met informally with representatives of civil society.

11. Prime Minister Kostunica stated that, despite the constructive approach of the Serbian delegation, no agreement on Kosovo's future status had been reached. The Albanian side considered Kosovo's independence as the only viable solution. The Special Envoy, on his part, based his proposal on the presumption that Kosovo's independence was predetermined. The Prime Minister rejected such an approach and reiterated that Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) had not been fully implemented. He particularly emphasized the lack of returns of internally displaced persons, the destruction of Serb property and patrimonial sites, insufficient freedom of movement for the Kosovo Serbs and failure to bring to justice perpetrators of violence against the Serbs.

12. The Prime Minister noted that Serbia was not satisfied with the status quo. In this regard he favoured direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina. Serb-Albanian relations had a long history and in his opinion should not be judged by the past decade alone. Serbs and Albanians were able to live side by side in southern Serbia and some 30,000 still lived in Belgrade. This, in the Prime Minister's opinion, proved that the two communities could repair their relations in Kosovo. At the same time, he rejected threats of violence with a view to seceding from Serbia. He stated

that the Kosovo problem could be resolved through "supervised autonomy", which in his opinion was a democratic and open solution. Unlike independence, such an arrangement could be adjusted at a later stage. Serbia had proposed this option to the Special Envoy at the beginning of the Vienna talks, but it had never been properly discussed. He expected the Security Council mission to give the autonomy option a thorough consideration.

13. A member of the Negotiating Team and adviser to the Prime Minister, Mr. Slobodan Samardzic, noted that negotiations had never been held on the Special Envoy's proposals with regard to constitutional arrangements, justice and the international presences. Since September 2006, there had been virtually no meetings, despite unfinished talks on decentralization and religious sites. The high-level meeting held following the presentation of the Special Envoy's proposal favoured only one side. Mr. Samardzic therefore considered that the status proposal was not based on the outcome of the parties' talks, and suggested that negotiations be continued.

14. The Coordinator of the Negotiating Team, Mr. Leon Kojen, outlined the Serbian proposal for broad substantial autonomy under international supervision. This arrangement envisaged that Kosovo would be vested with executive, legislative and judicial powers while Serbia would retain control over foreign policy, defence, border control, monetary and customs policy, and the protection of Serbian religious and cultural heritage and human rights. Such autonomy would be renegotiable after a certain period. Serbia was willing to discuss Kosovo's access to international financial institutions. Kosovo would have a choice: either special representation in Serbia's institutions, or full participation in the political institutions at the central level.

15. The President of the Coordination Centre for Kosovo, Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic, noted that currently some 209,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo remained in 92 collective centres. Only 2 to 5 per cent of internally displaced persons had been able to return to Kosovo since 1999, and most of them were over 65 years old. According to her, lack of freedom of movement and insecurity were the main obstacles to return. Occasional attacks on returnees sent a negative message to the Serbs. Some 156 Serbian churches had been destroyed since 1999 but only those damaged in March 2004 had been slowly reconstructed.

16. The mission then met with the President of the Republic of Serbia, Boris Tadic.

17. President Tadic stated that resolution 1244 (1999) had not been fully implemented, in particular in terms of the safe return of internally displaced persons. Conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants had not been created. The return of Serbian military and police personnel, resulting from the reference to the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in resolution 1244 (1999), had not occurred.

18. He further indicated that Serbs in Kosovo lived in fear of a repetition of the violence of March 2004. While there had not been any major security incidents recently, low-intensity violence against Serbs and Serbian Orthodox patrimonial sites continued. In his opinion, these violent acts were aimed at the elimination of the remaining Serb pockets in Kosovo.

19. President Tadic claimed that Serbia's sovereignty over Kosovo, reaffirmed in Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), had been challenged by the Special Envoy's proposal. According to him, the settlement proposal failed to provide for effective self-government. It offered Kosovo Serbs less than they already had and did not go far enough in the protection of Serb patrimonial sites. Serbia's plan for substantial autonomy had not been given proper consideration. Therefore, President Tadic opposed the Special Envoy's plan and held that further negotiations, including direct talks, were the only way forward. He was particularly concerned that Kosovo's independence could destabilize Serbia and undermine regional stability, thus damaging European prospects for the Balkans. President Tadic believed in the possibility of reconciliation with Kosovo Albanians, emphasizing that Serbia was a different, democratic country from that of the Milosevic regime. President Tadic ruled out any use of force by Serbia and rejected threats of violence as an argument in favour of Kosovo's independence.

20. Afterwards, the mission held a discussion with the Chairman of the National Assembly and members of the party caucuses.

21. Representatives of political parties in the National Assembly almost unanimously rejected the Special Envoy's settlement proposal for Kosovo and favoured a "supervised autonomy" and the continuation of talks. The representative of the Serbian Radical Party asserted that, in case of independence, Kosovo would eventually be returned to Serbia anyway. Other parties stressed their support for Serbia's integration into Europe, while emphasizing that Serbia's agreement to Kosovo's independence as a condition for European Union accession was unacceptable. The head of the Vojvodina Deputies Group — drawing a parallel between Vojvodina and Kosovo — asserted that if an option entailing Kosovo's autonomy were chosen, Vojvodina would demand the same level of self-rule.

Pristina

22. After arrival at Pristina, the mission received a comprehensive briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Joachim Rücker, on 27 April 2007, as well as a briefing by the Commander of KFOR, General Roland Kather.

23. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General provided the members of the Security Council with an overview of the progress made by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), with a particular focus on the elements contained in paragraph 11 of the resolution. UNMIK had established Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, to which it had transferred all non-reserved competencies. Rule of law structures had been established and consolidated, and institutions required for a market economy had been created. In the area of returns of internally displaced persons, structures and financing for returns were in place and were being provided by the Provisional Institutions. Nonetheless, more progress was certainly required. The main concern for those wishing to return was the lack of economic prospects, together with a lack of clarity on Kosovo's future status. The Special Representative noted that Kosovo was not yet a truly multi-ethnic society, but significant steps had been taken in that direction, including the establishment of structures for multi-ethnicity. The reasons for this included the legacy of the Milosevic regime, the non-participation of Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo's central institutions, and the existence of parallel structures. He concluded that UNMIK had achieved what was possible, and

that any further progress was dependent on a resolution of Kosovo's status. While the population of Kosovo continued to trust the United Nations, it was increasingly frustrated by the lack of definition of Kosovo's status, and awaited action by the Security Council in this regard.

24. The Commander of KFOR briefed the mission on the security environment in Kosovo, which was generally calm and had been stable in the past eight months under his tenure. However, he cautioned that as long as Kosovo's status remained undefined, the situation in both Kosovo and the region remained at risk. KFOR was prepared to respond forcefully and effectively to any security challenges. He reassured the mission that, under any new arrangement, there would be no change in the mandate and mission of KFOR, and that its organization and size would remain unaltered in 2007, and most likely also in 2008.

25. The Security Council mission met with the Kosovo Team of Unity (President Fatmir Sejdiu, Prime Minister Agim Ceku, PDK leader Hashim Thaci, ORA leader Veton Surroi, Mr. Blerim Shala and Mr. Skendet Hyseni).

26. President Sejdiu conveyed the Team of Unity's unanimous and unqualified support for the Kosovo settlement proposal and status recommendation. He regretted that, despite a lengthy negotiation process, it had not been possible to reach an agreement with the Belgrade authorities. The President reiterated that Kosovo was prepared to implement the settlement proposal in its entirety, in accordance with a recent Kosovo Assembly resolution. He emphasized that Kosovo's society was committed to a multi-ethnic state, whose goal would be integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The Team of Unity believed that any further delay in the status process would be detrimental to Kosovo — it would not serve the interests of Kosovo's economy or of its minority communities. Kosovo's independence as outlined in the Kosovo settlement proposal now before the Security Council was the only acceptable option. Other solutions could not be contemplated. Kosovo was ready to assume the responsibilities associated with its independence.

27. The mission met with Prime Minister Agim Ceku and all 15 Ministers of the Kosovo provisional government.

28. Prime Minister Ceku emphasized that, during almost eight years of United Nations administration, Kosovo's infrastructure had been rebuilt. Its institutions were in place, its budget fully financed from its own revenues, and its law enforcement structures well established. He assured the mission that Kosovo would fully implement the settlement proposal. The Prime Minister was of the view that any further delay in the Kosovo status process would achieve nothing. The mission was further briefed on achievements in key areas of standards, namely, functioning provisional institutions, returns, property, and cultural heritage. Kosovo's institutions had been built up since 2001; they now included 11 per cent minorities. Returns of internally displaced persons were a priority for the Provisional Institutions, which had established a process and structures for returns. The vast majority of homes had been rebuilt and substantial financing for returns projects had been provided. Although the provisional government was fully committed to returns, these remained insufficient. He believed that the lack of clarity on status and the lack of cooperation by the authorities in Belgrade also contributed to the low numbers of returns. Clarity on status would accelerate returns. In the area of property, practically all claims relating to private property had been adjudicated. With regard to cultural heritage, the majority of the sites damaged during the events

of March 2004 had been repaired. The Prime Minister recognized that standards had not been entirely fulfilled, but emphasized that substantial progress in their implementation had been made.

29. The mission met with the Speaker of the Kosovo Assembly, Mr. Kole Berisha, and the leaders of the Assembly political groups.

30. Kosovo had held four successful elections and its democratic process had led to the creation of a functioning and representative Assembly. In accordance with the Constitutional Framework, 20 reserved seats — 10 for Kosovo Serb representatives and 10 for representatives of other communities — were set aside in the Assembly. Mr. Berisha regretted that Kosovo Serbs refused to participate in the Assembly's plenary meetings, although they did take part in the work of its committees. The Assembly functioned in a fully transparent and public manner, and all aspects of its work were monitored and scrutinized by international organizations.

31. The mission also met with Kosovo Serb representatives, including Mr Randjel Nojkic of the Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija and Mr. Branislav Grbic, Minister for Returns and Communities.

32. The firm position of those who expressed themselves on the issue was that independence for Kosovo was not an option, and that the Kosovo settlement proposal was generally unacceptable. They stated that Kosovo Albanian leaders had refused to accept any proposals and amendments offered by the Belgrade authorities. The mechanisms envisaged in the settlement proposal for the protection and promotion of minority rights were insufficient, and would never be implemented. This was already evident in the current situation, in which breaches of rights and procedures contained in both resolution 1244 (1999) and the Constitutional Framework were common. At the same time, some elements of the settlement proposal — such as the organization of municipal competencies and financing — were acceptable. Mr. Grbic explained that no plan was ideal. No perfect plan could be prepared, and compromises needed to be made. Mr. Nojkic sought to correct the misperception that Kosovo Serbs did not participate in the work of the Kosovo Assembly. Indeed, they actively participated in the work of its boards and committees. However, Kosovo Serbs did not see any merit in participating in the Kosovo Assembly plenary meetings, given that in that venue all minority proposals were consistently outvoted by the majority.

33. Members of the mission met with representatives of the Islamic community (Mr. Ahmet Sadriu, Deputy President of the Islamic Community) and the Catholic Church (Bishop Dodë Gjergji) and with representatives of non-Serb minorities in Kosovo (Mr. Murati of the Bosniak community; Mr. Yagcilar of the Turkish community, and Mr. Merxha of the Roma community).

34. Mr. Sadriu underlined how, despite numerous meetings, it had not been possible to achieve a common language and build positive relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church. Bishop Gjergji noted the historically good relations with Islam. In the past, there had not been any difficulties in relations among religious confessions. However, he noted with deep regret the difficulties in establishing good relations with the Serbian Orthodox. Both believed that, while inter-faith relations would not be affected by Kosovo's eventual independence, independence was required to build up Kosovo's future and hope.

35. Members of the Turkish, Bosniak and Roma communities were fully integrated in Kosovo society and actively participated in the Kosovo Assembly. The Turkish and the Bosniak parties were part of the ruling coalition. They supported the Special Envoy's proposal despite its shortcomings and believed that it was a good basis for Kosovo's future and provided effective protective mechanism for minorities. They cited unemployment as the main challenge to their communities and noted the importance of targeted economic investments in minority areas.

36. The mission was provided with briefings on the current and planned activities of the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Kosovo by Mr. Torbjorn Sohlstrom, Head of the Preparation Team for the International Civilian Office; Mr. Casper Klynge, Head of the European Union Planning Team for Kosovo; Mr. Renzo Daviddi, Acting Head of the European Commission Liaison Office; and Mr. Wernet Wnendt, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Institution-Building Pillar of UNMIK.

37. They outlined the envisaged future engagement of the international community in Kosovo, as set forth in the Kosovo settlement proposal. Such an engagement would require a clear legal basis, provided by the Security Council. All planning was entirely preliminary and tentative and was being carried out in a manner that did not prejudge a decision on the outcome of the future status process, which rested entirely with the Security Council.

38. The International Civilian Office would have three broad functions: the supervision of the implementation of the settlement, overall coordination of the future international engagement in Kosovo, and the exercise of certain, limited, executive functions and intervention powers. The European Union-led Rule-of-Law Mission would function in an integrated manner, and combine police, justice, customs and correctional services. It would operate in support of the envisaged Kosovo authorities, and exercise some limited executive powers in respect of sensitive crimes. The European Commission's objectives would be to foster progress in Kosovo's structural and economic reform and ensure adequate financial assistance. The European Commission expressed concern that the lack of political and legal clarity on Kosovo's status remained a major obstacle to economic development and investment. As for OSCE, it would probably continue to work within the broader future international engagement as a free-standing mission, and would continue to draw on the strength of its extensive field presence, which currently focused on human and minority rights issues.

Gracanica

39. The mission then travelled to the Monastery of Gracanica, where it met with Bishop Artemije of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other Kosovo Serb representatives. Mssrs. Samardjic and Kojen were also present.

40. Bishop Artemije asserted that none of the provisions of resolution 1244 (1999) with a relevance for Kosovo's Serbs had been fulfilled. Since 1999, around 250,000 non-Kosovo Albanians had been expelled from Kosovo, and barely 2 per cent had returned. Around 1,300 had been killed. Kosovo Serbs were deprived of all their basic rights. The judicial institutions established by the international community in Kosovo had failed to bring to justice those responsible for crimes against Kosovo Serbs. Bishop Artemije believed that, without the creation of conditions for returns

of Kosovo Serbs, it was futile to search for a solution to Kosovo's future status. Bishop Artemije considered the Kosovo settlement proposal entirely unacceptable, in whole or in part. He complained about the quality of the reconstruction of Serbian Orthodox sites destroyed in March 2004. He had no opinion on the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and other religions in the case Kosovo would become independent, as he considered this to be clearly a hypothetical scenario.

Southern Mitrovica

41. The mission then travelled to southern Mitrovica, where it held meetings with the President of the Municipal Assembly, Mr. Mutsel Ibrahami, and representatives of the Municipality.

42. The President of the Municipal Assembly informed the mission that, beginning in 2000, local municipal structures had been successfully established. He stressed that Mitrovica's municipal government continued to make considerable efforts to implement the standards, with a particular priority on standards relating to freedom of movement, sustainable returns, and the promotion of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance. He believed that considerable progress had been made in each of these areas. Improvements in the local economy hinged on a resolution of Kosovo's status. The future of Mitrovica's governance was also uncertain, and questions remained about whether the concept of "one city, two municipalities" with a joint consultative administrative board — which was envisaged in the Kosovo settlement proposal — could be implemented in practice. The refusal by Kosovo Serbs to participate in Mitrovica's municipal government structures was a major obstacle to the concrete implementation of this concept. It was felt that any future joint administrative board should have executive and decision-making powers, and not be limited to a consultative role.

Northern Mitrovica

43. The mission then crossed the Ibar River and held a meeting with representatives of the Kosovo Serb community in northern Mitrovica, including Mr. Marko Jaksic, President of the Association of Serbian Municipalities; Mr. Milan Ivanovic, President of the Serbian Council for Northern Kosovo; Mr. Dragisa Milovic, President of the Municipal Assembly of Zvecan; Mr. Slavisa Ristic, President of the Municipal Assembly of Zuvin Potok; and Mr. Velimir Bojovic, President of the Municipal Assembly of Leposavic.

44. Mr. Jaksic conveyed extreme dissatisfaction with the lack of implementation of those provisions of resolution 1244 (1999) that were of particular relevance for the Kosovo Serb community. He dismissed all efforts by UNMIK and KFOR with regard to improving the living conditions and protections for Kosovo Serbs. He claimed that Kosovo had turned into an international centre of criminal activity and corruption. He categorically rejected the Kosovo settlement proposal and believed its aim was to create a second Albanian state in the Balkans. Mr. Ivanovic referred to recent attacks against Kosovo Serbs in a mixed area of northern Mitrovica, and held that these and other attacks against Kosovo Serbs were not being adequately reported. Conditions for return of Kosovo Serbs had not been created, and northern Mitrovica was the only truly multi-ethnic area of Kosovo. With regard to the Kosovo settlement proposal, Mr. Ivanovic believed that it would be an unacceptable

imposition of Kosovo Albanian rule over Kosovo Serbs. This prospect led to growing fears and frustrations among Kosovo Serbs.

Other locations

45. On the way back from Mitrovica, the mission visited the village of Svinjare which was destroyed during the riots of 2004. In June 2006, the Contact Group had urged the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to complete the remaining reconstruction of the village. At the request of the Prime Minister and with the agreement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Kosovo Protection Corps had been engaged in the reconstruction effort. The work had been completed by the end of 2006. However, the inhabitants of Svinjare remained reluctant to return because of security-related concerns.

46. On its way back to Pristina, while passing the Kosovo Electricity Company (KEK), the mission was briefed on the energy situation in Kosovo.

47. On 28 April, the mission visited the Serb quarter in Orahovac, where it met with the President of the Municipal Assembly, Mr. Esad Haxhijaha, and local Kosovo Serb, Kosovo Albanian and Roma inhabitants; the representatives of the Coordinating Centre for Kosovo and Bishop Artemije of the Serbian Orthodox Church also attended the meeting.

48. Mr. Haxhijaha noted that good relations between the communities had deteriorated during the armed conflict of 1998-1999, which had resulted in a number of missing persons on both sides. The municipality suffered from high unemployment. Lack of reconciliation between the two communities continued to be an obstacle to integration. The municipality was implementing an integration and return strategy; a committee on the freedom of movement had been operational since 2002. There had been no serious inter-ethnic incidents recently but the Kosovo Serbs in the town still had security concerns. Mr. Haxhijaha admitted the need for further efforts with regard to freedom of movement and returns and encouraged the Kosovo Serbs in Orahovac to cooperate on these matters.

49. Kosovo Serb representatives did not share this view. They were concerned about the lack of returns, difficulty in access to public services and institutions, destroyed property and discrimination in the privatization process. The representatives complained about psychological pressure, low-intensity harassment and insufficient protection from KFOR.

50. The mission also visited the nearby village of Krusha e Vogel, where members of the delegation met relatives of missing persons and heard an account of atrocities committed against Kosovo Albanian civilians by their Kosovo Serb neighbours in 1999.

51. The mission then visited the Kosovo Serb return site of Brestovik, where members of the mission held a discussion with returnees from that and other villages as well as from the city of Pec. Bishop Artemije of the Serbian Orthodox Church was also present.

52. Kosovo Serb representatives informed the mission that, of 75,000 Kosovo Serbs living in the region before 1999, only some 1,500 remained. Returns to this Albanian majority area were hampered by security concerns, the poor economic situation and the lack of access to social services. While reiterating their

determination to return and remain in the area, Kosovo Serb representatives indicated the lack of reconciliation and impunity for inter-ethnic crimes as impediments to returns. Long and complicated return procedures further discouraged potential returnees. Kosovo Serb representatives stressed the need to create a normal environment in Kosovo, noting that this would take some time. In their opinion, Kosovo's independence could negatively affect returns.

53. Later the same day, upon arrival at Vienna, the mission had an informal exchange with the Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, on various aspects of his proposal.

IV. Conclusions

54. The mission provided the Security Council with an opportunity to gain first-hand information on the situation in Kosovo.

55. The overall security situation in Kosovo remains calm but tense. The memories of the conflict of 1998/99 and of the attacks of March 2004 against Serbs and against the international presence are still perceptible. While the Kosovo Albanian community is confident about the future, the Kosovo Serb community is apprehensive about its prospects for the future.

56. Kosovo society is still recovering from the wounds inflicted by the conflict. Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities remain divided and live to a large extent separately from each other. The process of full reconciliation and effective integration will require a long-term commitment by all stakeholders. The commitment and readiness to build a Kosovo for all its communities, conveyed by Kosovo's political leaders, were encouraging.

57. The Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and UNMIK have made serious progress in the implementation of the standards for Kosovo. Progress has been made in establishing Provisional Institutions that are functional, and which are founded on the principles of ownership and accountability. More has still to be done, however, to implement the standards. The Provisional Institutions expressed their commitment to continue and strengthen the implementation of the standards, in particular those relating to the conditions of life of Kosovo's minority communities.

58. The return of internally displaced persons remains a critical element in the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999). The number of sustainable returns continues to be very low. Although structures for the return of internally displaced persons are in place and despite the role played by international organizations, complicated return procedures, the lack of economic prospects, difficulties associated with freedom of movement and security-related concerns were mentioned as defining reasons why returns remained limited. Opposing points of view exist on whether a solution to the status of Kosovo would facilitate or hinder the returns process.

59. The positions of the sides on the Kosovo settlement proposal remain far apart. The Belgrade authorities and the Kosovo Serb interlocutors who expressed themselves on this issue remained firmly opposed to the Kosovo settlement proposal and rejected a solution that would entail any form of independence. All called for a solution based on genuine compromise, to be reached through further negotiations between the sides. There was recognition, however, that the current status quo was

not sustainable. Kosovo Albanian representatives and representatives of non-Serb communities, on the other hand, expressed clear and unambiguous support for the Kosovo settlement proposal and recommendation on Kosovo's future status. Expectations among the majority Kosovo Albanian population for an early resolution of Kosovo's future status were very high. The representatives looked to the Security Council to move rapidly towards a solution, without any further need for negotiations between the sides.

60. The mission noted the importance, stressed by many, of promoting a European perspective for the region, including for Kosovo. This European prospect can provide direction for future political and economic development and thus contribute to consolidating stability in Kosovo and, by extension, in the region as a whole.